

Serial No. 09/990,948
Amdt. dated July 21, 2004
Reply to Office Action of April 27, 2004

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-44 (cancelled).

45. (previously presented) A chemical mechanical polishing process, comprising the steps of:

- (a) forming a conductive layer over a semiconductor substrate; and
 - (b) patterning said conductive layer to form interconnect lines;
 - (c) forming at least one dielectric layer over said interconnect lines, said at least one dielectric layer having a first thickness;
 - (d) polishing said at least one dielectric layer to form a planar surface;
- and
- (e) forming a thin cap layer over said planar surface, said thin cap layer having a second thickness which is sufficient to fill scratches formed in said at least one dielectric layer during said polishing step (d), and which second thickness is substantially less than said first thickness.

46. (previously presented) The method of claim 45 wherein said first thickness is about 20K Angstroms to 30K Angstroms, and said second thickness is about 1K to 3K Angstroms.

47. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said first thickness is about ten times greater than said second thickness.

48. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said cap layer prevents metal bridges from forming in said scratches of said at least one dielectric layer.

Serial No. 09/990,948
Amdt. dated July 21, 2004
Reply to Office Action of April 27, 2004

49. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said at least one dielectric layer includes a fluorinated silicon glass (FSG) layer.

50. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said at least one dielectric layer further includes a high density plasma chemical vapor deposition layer formed between and over said interconnect lines.

51. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said cap layer includes silicon oxide, silicon nitride, phosphosilicate glass (PSG), and/or silicon-rich oxide.

52. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said conductive layer includes doped polysilicon.

53. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said cap layer provides a higher degree of surface planarity than said planar surface, and further forms a highly planar surface that can reduce undesirable diffractions from height differences so that during a subsequent photolithographic operation undesirable diffractions from height differences are reduced.

54. (previously presented) The method of claim 45, wherein said further including the steps of:

- patterning said cap layer and said at least one dielectric layer to form openings to said conductive layer;

- forming an additional conductive layer over said cap layer and in said openings, such that conductive vias are formed between said conductive layer and said additional conductive layer;

- patterning said additional conductive layer to form additional interconnects over said cap layer.

55. (previously presented) A chemical mechanical polishing process, comprising the steps of:

- (a) forming a conductive layer over a semiconductor substrate;

Serial No. 09/990,948
Amdt. dated July 21, 2004
Reply to Office Action of April 27, 2004

- (b) patterning said conductive layer to form interconnect lines;
- (c) forming at least one dielectric layer over said interconnect lines, said at least one dielectric layer having a first thickness;
- (d) polishing said at least one dielectric layer to form a polished surface; and
- (e) forming a thin cap layer over said polished surface to planarize said polished surface, said thin cap layer having a second thickness which is substantially less than said first thickness.

56. (previously presented) The method of claim 55 wherein said first thickness is about 20K Angstroms to 30K Angstroms, and said second thickness is about 1K to 3K Angstroms.

57. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said first thickness is about ten times greater than said second thickness.

58. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said cap layer prevents metal bridges from forming in said scratches of said at least one dielectric layer.

59. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said at least one dielectric layer includes a fluorinated silicon glass (FSG) layer.

60. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said at least one dielectric layer further includes a high density plasma chemical vapor deposition layer formed between and over said interconnect lines.

61. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said cap layer includes silicon oxide, silicon nitride, phosphosilicate glass (PSG), and/or silicon-rich oxide.

62. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said conductive layer includes doped polysilicon.

Serial No. 09/990,948
Amdt. dated July 21, 2004
Reply to Office Action of April 27, 2004

63. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said cap layer provides a higher degree of surface planarity than said planar surface, and further forms a highly planar surface that can reduce undesirable diffractions from height differences so that during a subsequent photolithographic operation undesirable diffractions from height differences are reduced.

64. (previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein said further including the steps of:

 patterning said cap layer and said at least one dielectric layer to form openings to said conductive layer;

 forming an additional conductive layer over said cap layer and in said openings, such that conductive vias are formed between said conductive layer and said additional conductive layer;

 patterning said additional conductive layer to form additional interconnects over said cap layer.